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Protect America's Waters From Irresponsible Mining

One of the primary goals of the federal Clean Water Act (CWA) is to prohibit the use of our nation's rivers, lakes, and wetlands as dump sites for pollution. Unfortunately, federal agencies have undercut that goal by adopting regulations that allow hard rock mines to treat the nearest river valley or lake as a waste dump for massive quantities of toxic tailings. History has shown that many of these mines have devastating impacts on local communities and fish and wildlife populations, effects which are often felt for decades.

Closing the regulatory loopholes in the Clean Water Act would not prohibit hard rock mining, but would help minimize the impacts of large mines in areas with extensive wetlands, streams, and other protected waters. In some places, such as the fragile headwaters of Bristol Bay in Alaska, requiring developers to store tailings on upland sites could potentially stop mining completely.

Close Loopholes in the Clean Water Act and Protect Alaska's Bristol Bay

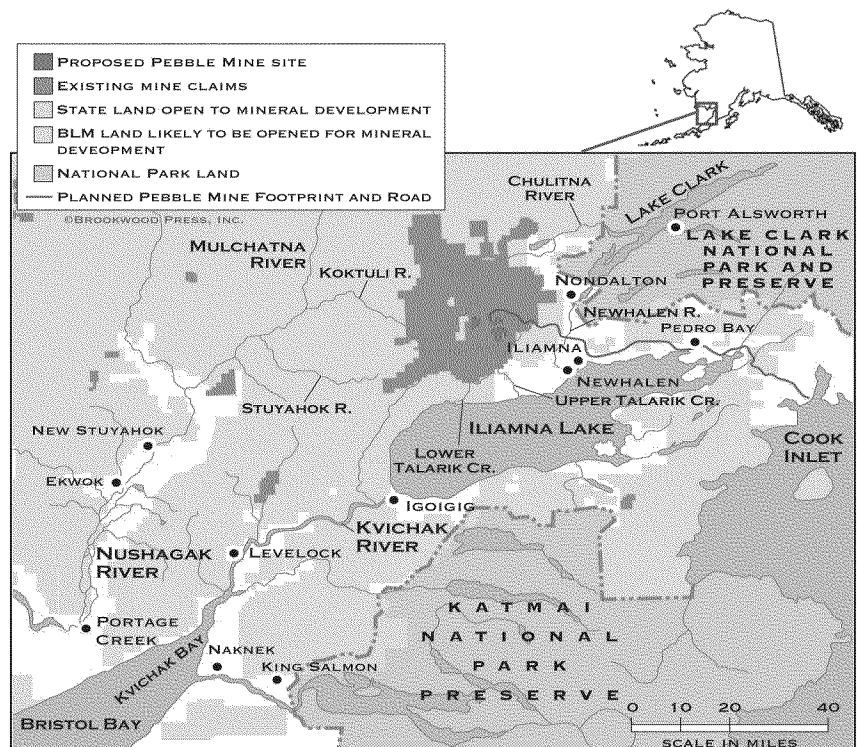
Pebble Mine

Two foreign corporations, Anglo American and Northern Dynasty, are now proposing to build the Pebble Mine on public land in Bristol Bay's fragile headwaters. The Pebble would be the largest open pit gold and copper mine in North America.

Bristol Bay's salmon are the foundation of a vibrant community of wildlife that includes bears, wolves, moose, caribou, and waterfowl.

The region's pure waters, healthy habitat, and breathtaking wilderness are also treasured by the human inhabitants, generating millions of dollars for the local economy by sustaining a thriving commercial and sport fishery and tourism industry, and supporting the centuries-old subsistence lifestyle of Alaska Natives.

The Bristol Bay watershed is a remote and spectacular area that sustains the world's largest remaining runs of sockeye salmon.



Mine Tailings and Fish Don't Mix

The proposed Pebble Mine threatens the economic, social, cultural, and ecological health of the region. Salmon are extremely sensitive to even slight increases in the presence of metals such as copper, which affect a salmon's sense of smell and direction, and ability to avoid predators. Unfortunately, open pit mines in America have a long and tragic history of contaminating both surface and groundwaters.

The Pebble Mine is a prime example of a mine that cannot be developed safely and responsibly. The situation is all the more alarming because the mine developers intend to bypass the Clean Water Act by taking advantage of one or both of the regulatory loopholes that allow discharges of toxic tailings into waters of the United States.

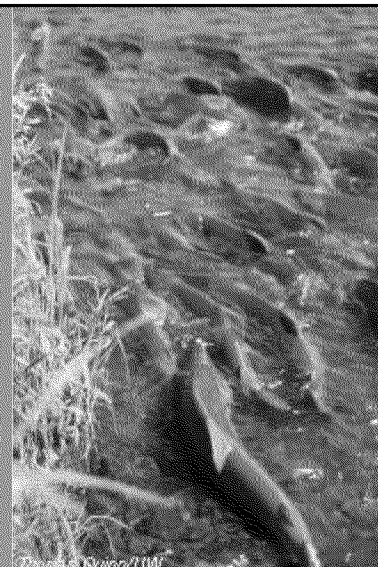
Preliminary plans indicate that:

■ Pebble Mine will discharge billions of tons of tailings into two enormous impoundments built directly on top of streams, ponds, and wetlands in the headwaters of some of the most productive salmon rivers on earth.

■ The larger of the two impoundments will include three earthen dams, each taller than the world's largest concrete dam, the Three Gorges dam in China. Both impoundments will contain a vast lake of toxic slurry hundreds of feet deep.

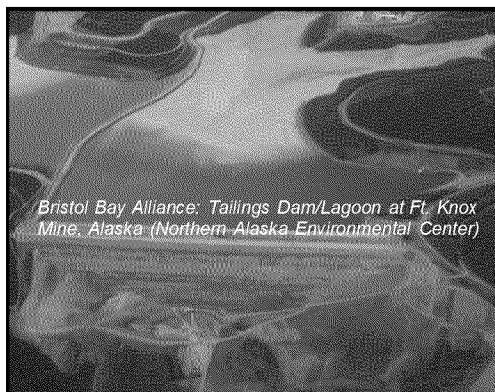
■ The mine site is located in a seismically active area and experiences frequent magnitude 6-7 earthquakes.

■ Dam failure, even decades from now, would be environmentally devastating, funneling mine pollution directly into the river systems that have been the life blood of Bristol Bay for centuries.



The practice of dumping mine tailings on top of low-lying streams and wetlands makes it cheaper and easier for Anglo American and Northern Dynasty to develop the Pebble Mine. However, it also destroys the very waters meant to be protected by the Clean Water Act and creates a much greater likelihood of harming downstream waters and fisheries if there is a structural failure.

Close the Loopholes that Harm Fish, Wildlife, and Communities



Bristol Bay Alliance: Tailings Dam/Lagoon at Ft. Knox Mine, Alaska (Northern Alaska Environmental Center)

Mine developers such as Anglo American and Northern Dynasty should play by the same rules as everyone else. As a nation, we decided that industries should not be able to profit from polluting the waters that sustain America's communities, fish, and wildlife.

Help us close the two loopholes in the Clean Water Act that encourage irresponsible mining practices and irresponsible mines like the Pebble Mine in Alaska. For more information or to join our email list, contact Tony Turrini at (907) 339-3911 or turrini@nwf.org.